

Landmarks and Local Characters

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PUB. Living Lore in New England

(Connecticut)

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WRITER Francis Donovan

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"Living Lore" Series

Francis Donovan, Thomaston, Conn.

January 6, 1939 LANDMARKS AND LOCAL CHARACTERS

"This," says Mr. Botsford, holding up a short mahogany rod furled to within a few inches of one end in red, white and blue ribbons, "has been in our family since Revolutionary days. My grandmother called it a 'marshal stick'. That stick was used to drill troops on the green

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in Roxbury by an ancestor of mine who was in Revolutionary army. My grandmother said he used to set up on his horse and direct the men with this stick. But you don't have to put that in the paper.

"I got to thinkin' about history after you'd left yesterday, and the thought come to me that this is the best way to hand it down. I mean for some old feller like myself with a good memory to pass it on like I'm doin' with you. That's why I got that old stick out to show you. That's one of the things.

"If I was twenty or thirty years younger I'd like to take you around through some of the country around here that I walked through with my father as a boy. That's how I got my knowledge of lots of interestin' things. It was passed on to me like that. Now I ought to pass it on.

"Lots of things will be forgotten. Lots of old landmarks will disappear and folks won't know anything about them in a few years. Like the road leadin' up to the airport in Plymouth. It was called One Pine road, when I was a boy. But there wasn't any pine there. My father told me there was one once, though-- a big 2 thick pine, standin' up against the sky, so's you could see it for miles. After it went, they still called it One Pine road. Now nobody calls it that anymore, its forgotten.

"Did you know we're livin' in the Boulder Belt? You find those big old boulders down a narrow strip in New England. Left by the glacier. Look at the Gaskins up back of the cemetery. Ever think about how that big pile of rocks got flung down there, one on top of the other? Glacier must have left them there. They was named for an old feller by the name of Gaskin who used to have a cabin up in there, so they tell me.

"It's somethin' to think about ain't it, all that stuff. You ever read where they found the bones of mammoths and other animals deep down in the ground, up in Siberia? What do

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you think about that? The way I figure, the world was changed, swift and complete, maybe by flood, the way it says in the Bible, forty days of rain.

“Change--it's changin' all the while. You never realize it till you get my age and stop to think of things that are gone. And the things that changed, and disappeared in the lifetime of my father before me.

“Did you know that this was minin' country once? In my father's lifetime there was lead mines around here. And when I was a young man I knew where they all were, the scars in the ground. Note [?]

“And my father showed me the entrance to a tunnel once, right where the Waterbury road runs now, down past the Spruces. Told me the story of it, too. Seems there was a feller worked in the shop, 3 had a bug on minin'. He was convinced there was silver in the ground around here. So he spent all his spare time diggin' this tunnel. Used to dig nights until bedtime. One time the fellers in the shop played a trick on him. They took some of those old three cent silver pieces and ground 'em up and sprinkled the dust around where he was diggin'. He thought sure he'd found silver. When he found out he'd been tricked, he went crazy. But I guess he was a little crazy to start with.

“That tunnel's all overgrown with brush now, doubt if I could find it. And there was other places, too I bet will be forgotten in a few years. Not many know how to get to Candlerock cave.

“Ever go over there? Ever see Leatherman's cave? Ever notice that little gravestone, just off the old road, and the ruins of a house? Old woman used to live there by the name of Marks. She had a house was kind of a curiosity. She collected snake skins, and queer things from the woods and made curios out of them. Charged you a nickel or a dime to go through her house. Her husband used to work in the shop. He had a long white beard and they called him Santa Claus. And once somebody left a little girl baby on their verandy. Old Lady Marks took that kid and raised it. Know what she called it? /June--that was the

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month it was left there-- June Left Verandy . It come out afterwards whose kid it was. The parents wasn't married. Note

"All those old landmarks --all this old history about Thomaston, will be forgotten soon. Maybe it ain't interestin' to most folks. It ought to interest Thomaston people anyway.

"The things that have happened in my lifetime---What if you had to go back to the days -- the way people lived when I was born.

4

Back to kerosene oil lamps and wood stoves and horses for transportation. Think of the changes, the inventions. The bicycle, the automobile, the airplane, the telephone, the radio, electric lights and electric service of all kinds.

"Why'd it all come so quick? Who knows. I think the education of the people had somethin' to do with it.

"There's my radio. I get a lot of enjoyment out of that. I often think how my father and mother would've enjoyed it. News is what I like best. Then I got a couple of sketches I always listen to. I never miss the Lone Ranger and Gang Busters. I used to listen to Amos 'n Andy but I got kind of tired of them. I got a record here of all the stations I've got on that set. More than 75 of them.

"Every afternoon I look in the paper and see what's on for the night, then I know just what I'm goin' to listen to. Do I think it'll ever replace newspapers? No sir, I do not.

"I like to read the paper. I'd do more readin' --I used to do a lot of it. Only my eyes won't stand it. My eyes ain't as good as they used to be."

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